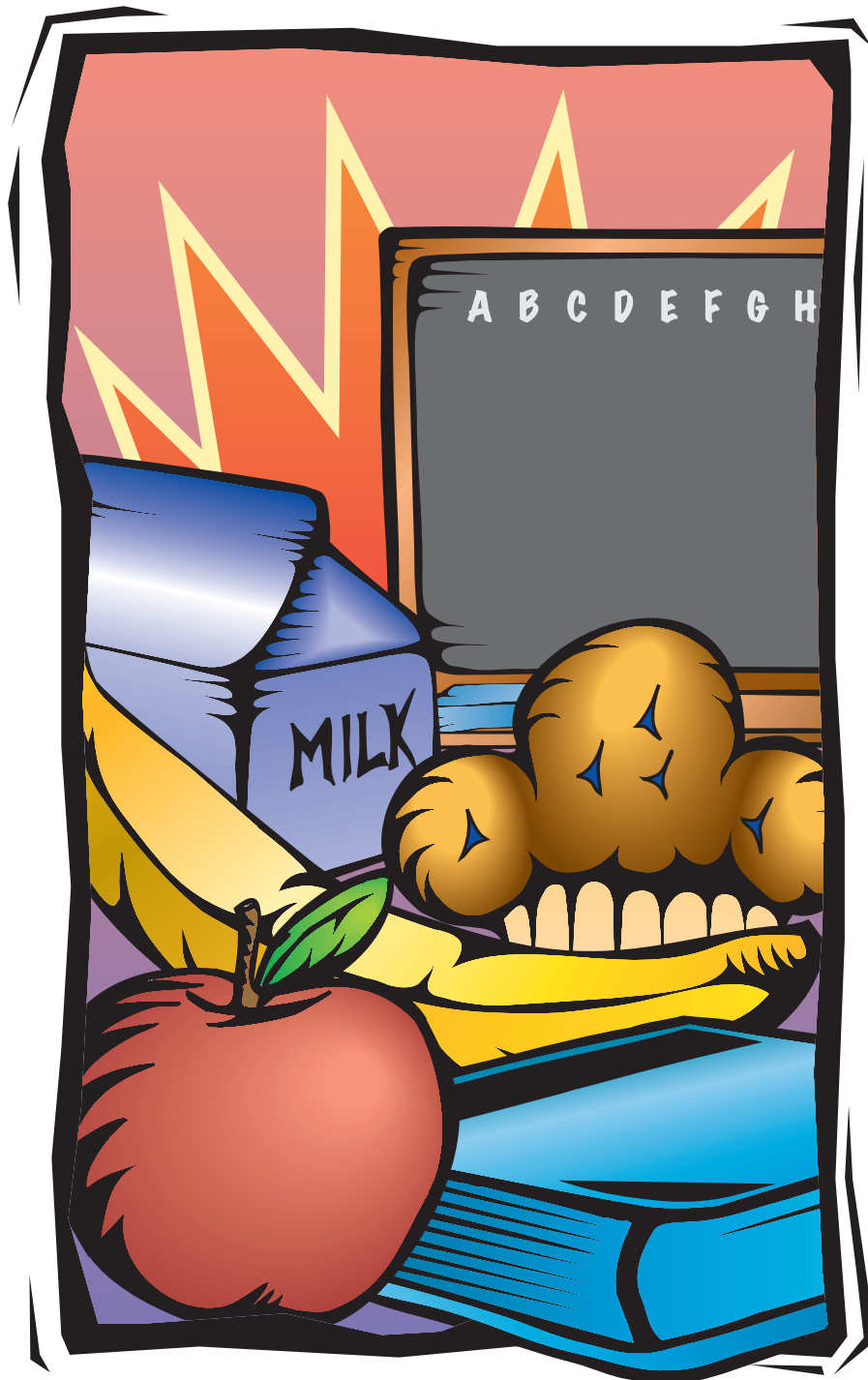


School Breakfast Programs Energizing the Classroom



A Summary of the
Three Year Study
of the Universal
School Breakfast Pilot
Program in Minnesota
Elementary Schools

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF

*Children
Families &
Learning*

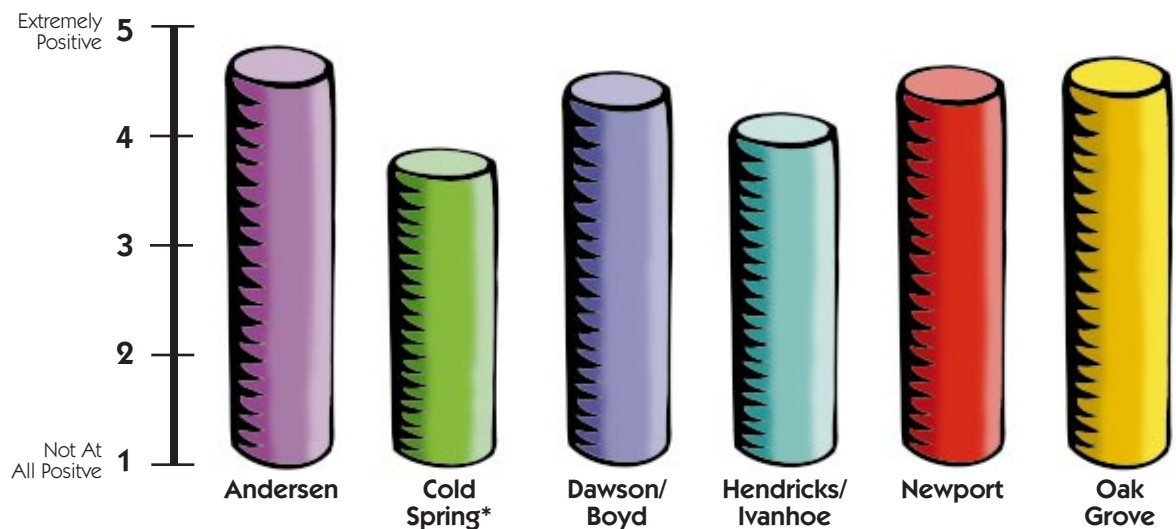
Introduction

In 1994, the Minnesota Legislature directed the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning (then the Minnesota Department of Education) to implement a universal breakfast pilot program integrating breakfast into the educational schedule for all students. The Department awarded grants to four elementary schools. Two additional sites were able to join the program through a corporate partnership. The Department was also charged with annually evaluating these sites to determine the impact of school breakfast on children's school performance including discipline, test scores, attendance and other measures of educational achievement.

The evaluation, performed by The Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota, shows that, when all students are involved in school breakfast, there is a general increase in learning and achievement. As the graph indicates, teachers' overall attitudes about the effect of school breakfast is overwhelmingly positive.

Clearly these pilot breakfast programs infuse a new level of energy into the school day: students are more attentive and are in the classroom more consistently, teachers support the program and appreciate the positive effects on students, for parents the program is more consistent with their children's natural sleeping and eating routines and it relieves some of the stress of rushed mornings. It is also an opportunity for community and parental participation in the educational process. At the pilot sites, school breakfast programs are more than cereal, fruit, toast and milk for a sleepy child prior to the start of class. It is a vital part of the curriculum and an integral element of a productive and successful educational day.

Teachers' Overall Feelings About Breakfast Project in Year 3



*Reflects year 2 data.

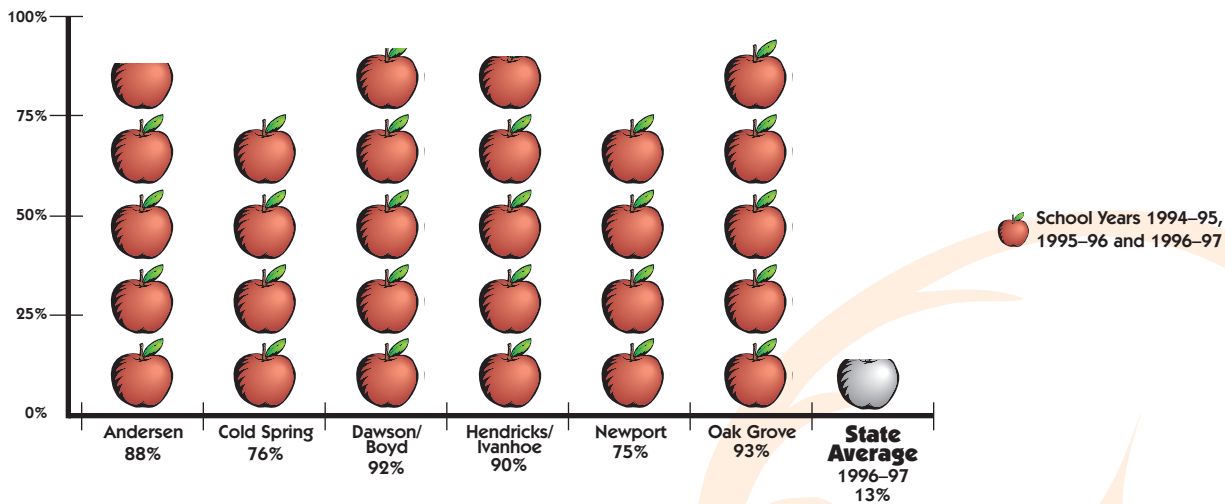
Participation

Data collected before this pilot program revealed that in schools with breakfast programs only 12% of students participated and only about half the students eligible for free or reduced meals ate breakfast most or all the time. By involving all students, these pilot programs eliminate the stigma of subsidized meal programs. Students from all socio-economic levels participate. Thus, on a nutritional basis they all start the school day equally. The extremely high participation rates, ranging from 75% at Newport Elementary to 93% at Oak Grove, affirm that the programs are well-liked by students.

"I think it's good because everyone is the same now."

— Student

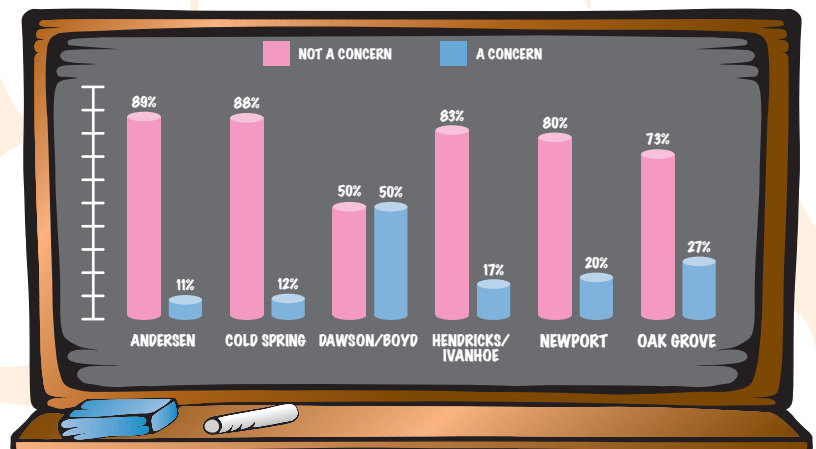
Participation Rates in School Breakfast Programs



Integration Into The School Day

Administrators report that school building and community attitude toward school breakfast remains positive. Food service personnel and advisory committees work closely with teachers to create programs that fit smoothly into the daily schedule and reinforce the curriculum by stressing the importance of nutrition. Some people feared that breakfast would cut into valuable classroom time. This did not materialize. Some classes use the time for reading, some watch educational programming and others complete worksheets as they eat. As the graph shows, teachers express very little concern over the time it takes for school breakfast. Furthermore, school breakfast has become a vital part of the educational day.

Teachers' Level of Concern for Time Away From Learning Early Spring 1996



Learning Readiness

“I really notice the difference this year. Last year I saw improved concentration, this year I see less aggression and improved attitudes.”

— Teacher

“[My daughter] is not one who can eat right when she gets up, so this poses a problem in her getting a healthy breakfast in the very early a.m. hours. The Breakfast time at school is the perfect solution to this problem.”

— Parent

At the pilot sites, students are better prepared for learning than ever. School breakfast helps reduce several of the common roadblocks to learning. When students are at the nurse’s office, they aren’t learning. When one student’s behavior disrupts the classroom, all students lose valuable learning time. When students are hungry or have headaches, they stop paying attention to the lesson. School breakfast helps eliminate many of these problems. Individual students and whole classrooms are better prepared for learning.

Increased Student Attention

According to teachers, students are more energetic at the start of the day and complaints about mid-morning hunger have noticeably decreased. One teacher noted that school breakfast gets her day started on a positive note and that students no longer complain about headaches or being hungry at 10:30 A.M. This was typical of all sites. Despite long bus rides and early starting times, students now have the energy to stay alert through the entire morning.

Improved Student Behavior

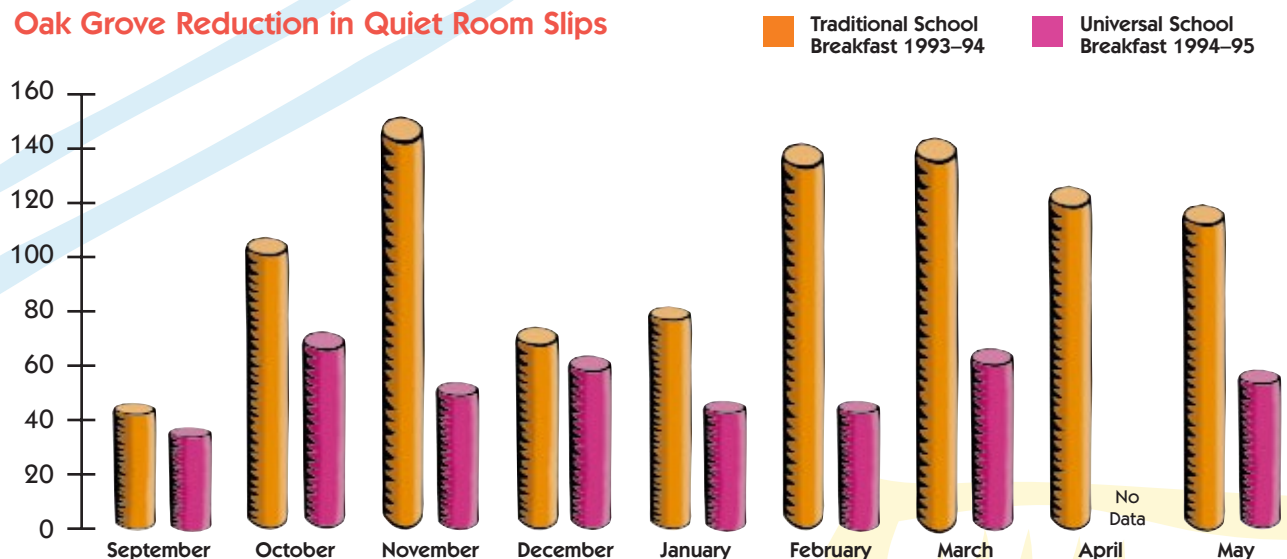
Classes at the pilot sites lose less educational time due to discipline problems. Nutritious school breakfast increases attention span and reduces class disruption. Fewer students are sent to the principal’s office. Administrators feel that school breakfast plays an important role in their 40%–50% decline in discipline referrals.

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“Breakfast for my child helped him to concentrate better on school work rather than thinking how much longer it would be till lunch.”

— Parent

Oak Grove Reduction in Quiet Room Slips



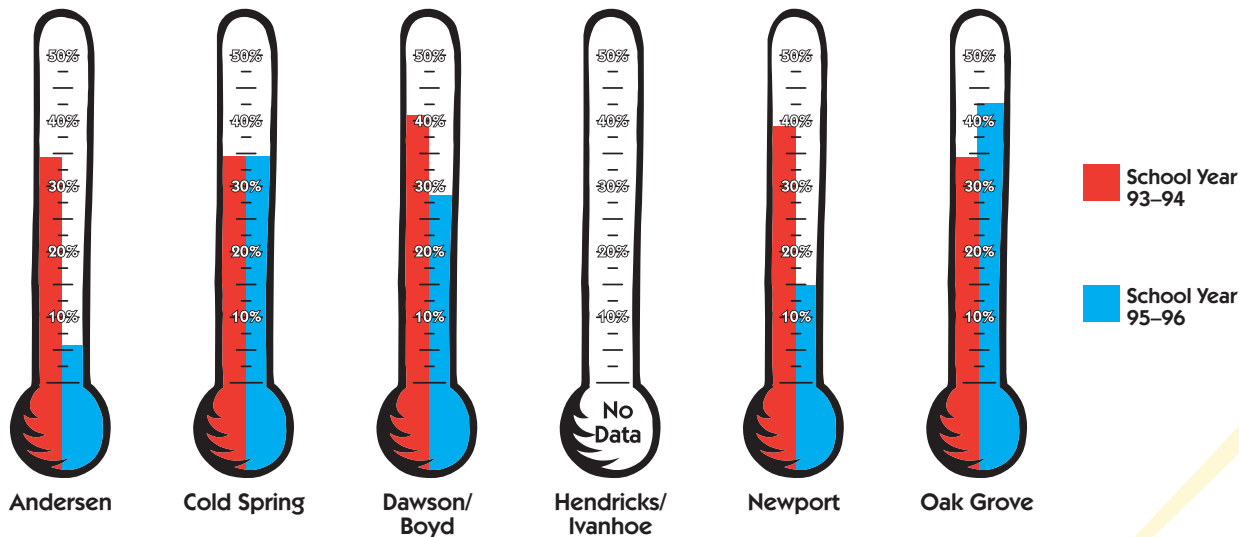
Reduced Nurse Visits

Reaction from school nurses supports the positive attitudes of teachers and administrators. As the graph below indicates, nurses report a significant decline in morning visits to their offices due to minor headaches and stomachaches. They conclude school breakfast is the reason students are spending less time at their office and more time in the classroom. Nurses comment that it would be a severe detriment to students if the program was discontinued and suggest expanding it to high schools.

"Kids are not coming down complaining they don't feel well. Now when they come down you know they have had breakfast and it could be a real sickness."

— Nurse

93–94 vs. 95–96 Percentage of Morning Nurse Visits for Minor Illness



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Test Scores

In comparing test scores of third graders before the universal school breakfast program with their scores as sixth graders after experiencing the program for three years, **there is a general increase in composite math and reading percentile scores.** With so many variables involved in testing, caution needs to be taken when interpreting achievement results. Nonetheless, the universal school breakfast program appears to play a role in improving student achievement.

"At first I thought it would be a disruption of learning. The breakfast program has only increased students' learning."

— Teacher

"It's one of the best things that has happened in our school district. There are positive benefits that cannot be measured on paper."

— Principal

“Our son eats at 6:30 and again when he goes to school. Since he began have another breakfast at school, his attention span has been much better and his grades improved; prior to this we had tried a lot of different things, methods and medication.”

— Parent

“...it is little to spend on long term results... It gives me time to visit with them [my students]. It is a nice way to start the day nutritionally, socially, and emotionally.”

— Teacher

Parent Reactions

In a survey of parents, over 91% agree or strongly agree that the pilot program results in a positive experience and that nutritious foods are offered. Many note that their children are not hungry early in the morning, but are ready to eat when they arrive at school. Mornings are a very busy time for many families with parents getting ready for work and kids getting ready for school. Many parents feel less stressed because they don't need to worry about preparing breakfast when everyone is rushed. Many parents note that their child's learning and concentration has increased because of the universal school breakfast program.

Social Benefits

The pilot sites note several indirect social benefits from school breakfast. It creates a new opportunity for interaction between students, teachers, parents, and community members. In many schools, siblings eat breakfast together and there is a healthy interaction among students of different grade levels. One administrator notes that children who are frequently isolated during lunch and other breaks are fitting in well with all students. Many classes utilize breakfast as an opportunity for less structured interaction among students.

Cold Spring—After the Project

When project funding for Cold Spring Elementary ended in February 1997, the School Breakfast Program was changed to the traditional free, reduced-price and paid meal reimbursements. As a result, participation in breakfast quickly dropped from 82% to only 18%. Parent interviews indicate that the additional financial burden and their children's lack of desire to eat when their friends aren't eating are key factors in the lower participation.

Two months after the program change, a majority of teachers reported an increase in physical complaints by students and hearing more students comment about being hungry by mid-morning. Over one-fourth of the teachers also reported a decrease in learning readiness.

“I think it was a good program to have. I don't work so my kids can have breakfast at home. But I know that it doesn't work like this for everyone.”

— Parent

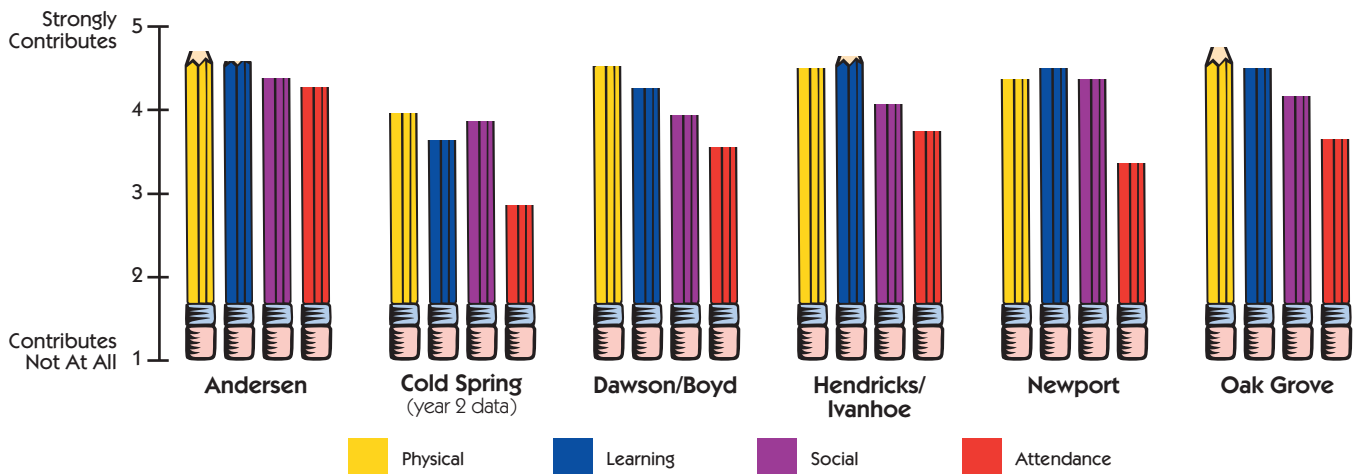
Conclusion

Overall, the response to the pilot program has been extremely positive. Teachers like the behavior and learning improvements, parents appreciate the program and the safety net it provides for them, students need the nutrition and enjoy the social aspects, and administrators find it easy to integrate into the daily educational routine. For these pilot schools, their universal breakfast program is no longer an experiment. It is an important, desired, energizing and effective element of the educational day.

"I hope it can continue. I think it's the best thing since sliced bread."

— Teacher

Teachers' Feelings About the Effect Breakfast has on Students' Behavior and Performance in Year 3

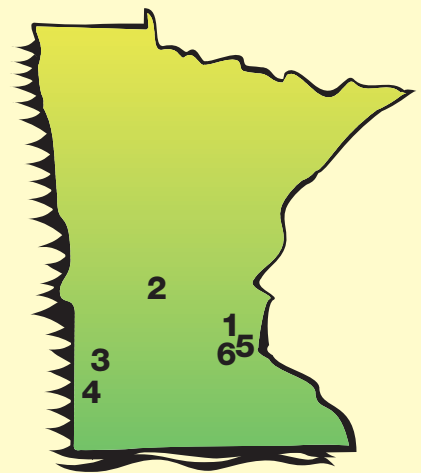


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The Sites

The six sites participating in the Universal School Breakfast Pilot Program are: Andersen Open School in Minneapolis (1), Cold Spring Elementary (2), Dawson/Boyd Elementary (3), Hendricks/Ivanhoe Elementary (4), Newport Elementary (5), and Oak Grove Elementary in Bloomington (6). They represent a cross-section of Minnesota communities, demographics and school systems.

The actual breakfast programs vary from school to school. Serving times range from 7:20 A.M. to past 9:30 A.M. Some schools serve students in the cafeteria directly after getting off the bus and others start classroom activities before eating. Several classes choose to eat in their rooms while reading, watching educational programming or doing class work. Menus vary but the food served contains more nutrition than the average breakfast.



MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF



Energizing the Classroom is based on a three year evaluation of the Universal School Breakfast Pilot Program conducted by the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI), 265-2 Peik Hall, 159 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455-0208.

Copies of this summary and the complete CAREI report are available from the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, Food and Nutrition Service at 550 Cedar Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-2273, or by calling (612) 296-6986, or in Minnesota (800) 366-8922.

Child Nutrition Programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture are available to all individuals regardless of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. Persons who believe that they have been denied equal opportunity may write to the Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250.

Upon request, this information can be made available in alternative formats.
TTY (612) 297-2094